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# ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

GEN. L. P. DI CESNOLA,  
*Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,*

AT THE

## UNVEILING

OF THE

# COLUMBUS MONUMENT,

IN THE

CITY OF NEW YORK.

OCTOBER 12TH, 1892.



NEW YORK,

1892.





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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

We meet to-day, under auspices most dignified and favorable, to render our tribute of commemoration to the enterprise and the man, with whose ever growing fame the world has rung for four now completed centuries; to whom, from us Italian born among all others, grateful and exalted commemoration is peculiarly due.

We present this monument to the City of New York, and we thank the City, and her Department of Public Parks, for the fitting and distinguished site by them selected for the erection of our accepted memorial.

The countrymen of Columbus, the Italians resident and citizens in the United States, conscious indeed that his true monument is this great land, its institutions, its prosperity, its blessings, its lessons of advance for all

humanity, have yet desired to testify, to at least the present generation, their full and un-failing sense of their great and peculiar debt.

They have procured, in contributions great and small, but uniformly large in spirit, the execution of this monument; and they have erected and presented it in token of their affection and gratitude to this great and beloved country; the country in which they have found a permanent home, a more congenial form of government, and better and freer facilities honorably to earn their livelihood.

To this endeavor, furthermore, has been given the sincerest approval and sympathy of both the people and the government of our native land. In glad acquiescence with our request, the Italian Government appointed a royal commission, comprising men of Italy of highest authority in the requisite arts, who carefully selected the plans for this monument in all its details, entrusted its execution to Gaetano Russo, who is present at this celebration, and who is second to none of living Italian sculptors, and gave the work their

active superintendence till its completion.

Still further to testify their sympathy, and as a special evidence of good will towards this country, the Italian Government was pleased to order a vessel of its navy to convey and deliver our offering at this port. It was further pleased expressly to detail and send the ship of war "Bausan" to participate in the City's celebration; and to instruct its diplomatic representatives at Washington, with its consular officers at New York, to be present in their official capacity at these ceremonies and celebration.

We, indeed, can add no lustre to the name of our immortal countryman. His monument is the new world, and its reflex renewal of the old.

Yet is it fitting that we, Italian Americans, in justice to our own sense and to our own hearts, should erect and inaugurate this monument to-day. There are, too, ever those who will forget and grovel, if no care is given, by precept and by visible memorial, to tell to coming generations the deeds and achieve-

ments of heroes of the past, and hand down to posterity our better inheritance.

Long before Columbus' day, it had been familiar to science that the world was round; in Ptolemy and Strabo were to be read the identical lessons and illustrations of our elementary geographies of to-day; as early as the eighth century a Syrian ecclesiastic had discovered means of measuring the length of a degree on the earth, and knew of the earth's compression at the poles; and the isle "Atlantis" itself was dimly to be discerned in hazy tradition. But all had been forgotten, and the science of science of the earth and sky had become heresy.

The monuments of it all lay buried in the dust of libraries, and the whole inheritance therein had been despised for a mess of the pottage of ignorance and indolence.

The son of the wool-comber of Genoa came (in 1436-1446) into an old world to be re-discovered, before he could discover, if not re-discover, a new. At the University of Pavia he doubtless laid the foundation of his mathematical and nautical attainments; but not till after

his choice of the life of a sailor, at the age of fifteen, and subsequently sailing, as he says, "wherever ship has sailed"—to England, ultima Thule or Iceland, the Greek isles, the Guinea coast, did he learn from Ptolemy and the other ancients the old fact that the earth was round, learn to draw charts and to construct spheres, and become the most learned, as well as the most consummate, practical navigator of his times. Naval battle and shipwreck, followed by chart-drawing for a livelihood, poring over the old log-books of his naval father-in-law, and talking with old seamen, opened to his views the probability of a short western route to the East Indies; and thenceforward his life was one of struggle and toil, in which more the man of affairs and the man of science, more the man of letters and the oral advocate, were truly the character of Columbus, than the mere educated navigator. But tremendous conflict is the price of every advance for good in this world; nor in that age could private enterprise accomplish any great work, nor surmount any very great obstacle.

Nothing could be done without governmental aid, and the further aid of the clerical keeper of the governmental conscience.

Rejected by the Senate of his native Genoa, Columbus met only treachery at the court of the more enlightened John II. of Portugal, who, through bad advisers, was about to steal the plan of Columbus, and send an expedition without the latter's knowledge.

Spain was tried again and again, only to meet overwhelming and humiliating opposition from a legion of misquoted biblical texts; although Columbus' aims were missionary, and nothing less than the discovery of the marvelous province of Cipango and the conversion to christianity of the Grand Khan. Spain, however, in 1490, rejected his project as vain and impracticable, and unbecoming the notice of royalty.

Setting out for France, in despair, Columbus was reduced to beg bread and water for himself and his son Diego, at the monastery of La Rabida at Palos; and in this extremity the tide at last begins to turn. The convent

guardian is Juan Perez de Marchena, an ardent student of geography, and former confessor to Queen Isabella. All honor to him! He wrote to the Queen, who sent money to bring Columbus back to Granada; where, though not till after long, wearisome, and repeatedly broken-off negotiations, and on the entreaty of Luis de Santangel, Queen Isabella was induced to determine on the expedition; offering to pledge, we are told, her jewels, since the kingdom's revenues were all but exhausted by the struggle that had just ended in expelling the Moors.

All the world knows how, on Friday, the 3rd of August, 1492, his decked-ship, the Santa Maria, with a crew of fifty men, and his two caravels, the Pinta with thirty men and the Nina with twenty-four men, weighed anchor and stood out for the Canary Islands; and how, after discouragements amounting almost to mutiny, at two in the morning of Friday, the 12th of October, 1492, the land of "Guana-hani," which he named San Salvador, was sighted by Roderigo de Triana, a sailor on the Nina; and how, after accidents, adventures,

and discoveries, the *Nina* alone of the fleet returned and arrived at Spain (having barely escaped capture at the Azores) in March, finally dropping anchor at Palos on Friday the 15th.

All the world knows, too, the honors showered upon Columbus, and the triumphant exultation of their Majesties of Spain; the sending of a second expedition in 1493; with colonists, adventurers, and missionaries; the discoveries, the settlements, the troubles, the mutinies; the sickness of the hero; the conspiracies against him; and how finally the tide turned in his favor on his return—clad in the humble dress of a Franciscan friar.

All the world knows, too, of his third voyage, where detraction was still more powerful, and finally sent him back to Spain in chains; although on this voyage he discovered the continent of South America.

All the world, too, knows how detractions, persecution, perils at the hands both of enemies and false friends, continued to pursue him on his fourth voyage, till at last, wearied out by



perpetual struggles, slander and illness, at Valladolid, on the 20th of May, 1506, he ended a life that was troubled to the last; though in honor, and leaving an imperishable name to his inheritors. Whether his remains still rest in San Domingo, as claimed by the archbishop of that island, or whether they (and not those of his son) were actually transferred thence to the cathedral of Havana, as supposed and intended about a century ago, his obsequies have thrice been celebrated with all state and solemnity, and his memory has ever been cherished by his detractors and their descendants, with all the zeal that belongs to the generation that builds the tombs of the prophets whom its fathers have killed.

Detraction and injury were in exceeding large measure the life reward of Columbus, as they are to-day of most of the great and good, and of all the world's most distinguished benefactors. But in that respect this generation of his countrymen does lay claim to purity of heart, with a most loyal reverence and grati-

tude toward Columbus; and toward the American republic, for the inestimable inheritance which he has left us.

In the Metropolitan Museum of Art is a great and noble painting by Brozik, setting forth the moment when the agreement between Columbus and Isabella was signed and sealed, the 17th of April, 1492. No painting in the Museum is more popular, or more deservedly so; for it tells its own vivid story, and portrays this crisis in the world's history in a manner that is grasped on the instant by every one. The life-like presentation of the Queen's understanding sympathy, quite withdrawn from the jewel caskets, and wholly absorbed in the exposition of Columbus—who again is fired with the lofty certainty of his demonstrated purpose, and glowing with the assurance of finally attained appreciation; while the satisfied and confident, but cautious, Ferdinand still holds the pen, giving most earnest heed to Columbus' words; the courtiers, the Queen's father confessor (Ximenes, here

pardonably presented as a cardinal, a little in advance of the dignity itself), the chief commanders of the army and navy, and dignitaries of various kind and degrees, sit in audience, manifesting various thoughts or beliefs, incredulity or amazement, upon their countenances—vivid and powerful is the scene; but the popular heart leaps beyond the mere estimate of art, and loves—and continually testifies before that canvas its love for Columbus and the exalted, self-sacrificing Isabella who befriended him.

Isabella! But when, in time of need, or effort, or sacrifice, have women been found wanting? To them appeals, upon them rests, the laborious, the patient, the quiet, the long suffering, and the efficacious part in all the world's great struggles; no less than in the minor private ones, which bring little out-door renown, but which guide and control the world as surely and efficiently as the wise matron rears her cradle charge to strength and virtue. Scarcely ever, since the crying of the infant

Moses touched the heart of Pharaoh's daughter, and led her to adopt and rear the infant to become the saviour of the Jewish people, the law-giver of the ages, and the great transmitter in high antiquity of truth and religion, has a woman held a place or wielded an opportunity comparable with that of Isabella. We know no other mother of a new world.

Yet, thank heaven, she is not alone in the roll of women conspicuous for great and excellent services to the race. Women like Zenobia, Elisabeth of England, Victoria, and our own dear beloved Margherita of Italy, have exalted royalty; women like Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale have glorified, dignified or mitigated one or the other aspect of war; bringing victory on the one hand, or succor and healing on the other; but our joy and boast to-day is the host of women of our own land, who, in walks of life both humble and conspicuous, have ever lent, and who still do ever lend, inestimable aid to every good work, religious, secular and domestic, in every grade

of life, for well-being, excellence, happiness and relief.

It is the woman in Isabella, not her throne, nor her opportunity, that we most cherish and exalt. All honor to the maids and matrons of the new world, who have never failed to emulate her example, or to manifest their native queenliness. They shall preserve, as Isabella disclosed, this our great country.

Could we suppose the ages to retrocede, or rather, that the deeds and the legacy of Columbus should be blotted from the history of the last four centuries, we might then obtain some just idea of the event we celebrate to-day. What would the old world be, with its ever-teeming millions, swarming in their circumscribed limits as in an over-crowded hive? Where would be the world's navigation or commerce, or the higher sciences upon which both depend? What would be the night of superstition over the crowded, struggling, perhaps despairing, multitudes of the old world?

Where would the light have broken forth? Or rather, how would not the light that almost contemporaneously broke forth in the invention of printing and other valuable arts, have not been overborne and extinguished? What would have been the fate of the reforms and revolutions in the old world, in the subsequent centuries? Where would freedom have found a cradle, or the better germs of life and government, that budded in the old world, have found a soil in which to grow and thrive unchoked by the prescriptive thorns of tyranny, superstition, and want? Where would be the millions who now form the vast common people living in more freedom, comfort, health, convenience, happiness and respectability, than the world has hitherto known in any clime or age?

Would not our multitudes be old-world grovelers, ill-clad, uninstructed? Would not some among our millionaires be butcher's boys in Germany, weary silk-weavers in France, canal drivers in Holland, miners in Wales,

shepherd-lads in Scotland, or peat-diggers in Ireland?

Where would be our art? Where would be the noble names that have adorned the bar, the legislative hall, the rostra, the council or the pulpit; that have illumined the bench; or expounded or enforced the laws of nations to a wider world?

And what would be the old world without the reflex from the new, in all that develops and ennobles the man or the nation; that has helped it to learn that "stranger" is not a synonym for "enemy," and even taught it that in almost every ancient *casus belli* there is a better resort than war?

A new world opened in freshness and beauty; an old world regenerated and rejuvenated; the rise of millions from bodily and spiritual groveling to erect manhood; the birth of newer and better nations of regenerated and better men;—these, and these, in all sober prospect, to grow and spread beyond the computation if not the imagination of man, are

what we owe to the unique genius and enterprise of Columbus; and this it is, which, in words inadequate, we commemorate to-day.

God said "Let there be light," and there was light.

Long may we, and our children, and our children's children, joy and prosper and live gratefully in its beams!









